



MCEC Testimony before the National Commission on the Future of the Army, 9 July, 2015

Submitted to:

General Thurman and Committee Members, my name is Jack Ballantyne and I live at 455 Arrowhead Point Road, Belton, Texas. I am the Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for the Military Child Education Coalition, MCEC, a non-profit organization. On a personal note, growing up as a military-child, I also served over 30 years and now with a son who is serving we proudly are a fourth generation Army family. Now as a retired US Army officer and one who continues serving in support of all our military-connected children, I appreciate your efforts on behalf of all the Army-connected children, Active, Guard and Reserve. Thank you for allowing me to present testimony in support of your assessment of and recommendations for the size and force mix of the Army consistent with available resources and anticipated future resources. My perspective, for your consideration, will address these resources through the lens of the potential implications for the Army-connected child.

MCEC – An Overview

The MCEC was established as a 501 c. (3) organization in 1998. Our founders were a group of military leaders, parents and public school leaders in the Fort Hood area who were concerned that as military children moved around our Nation and around the world as part of their parents' regular duty assignments, the school transitions and resulting academic disruptions were increasingly complex.

The MCEC is a national and international non-profit with our headquarters in Central Texas. We work in all 50 states and around the world where United States military-connected children live and go to school. Our mission is to ensure inclusive, quality educational experiences for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition.

We conduct and sponsor research on effective student transitions, conduct training for professionals who work with military-connected children, organize and train student leaders to assist their peers in smooth school transitions, train the parents of military-connected children to support their efforts to ensure that their children have excellent school experiences and advocate for research-based practices that promote personal and academic growth for military-connected children.

I have included a one-page summary about our organization with my testimony.



A Call to Action

As a Nation, it is our collective duty to ensure the continued recruitment and retention of the world's most highly qualified military force -- an all-volunteer force. Everyone plays a role in this critical effort, including Army and local community leaders and our education agencies. Key to the recruitment and retention of our Army force is the expectation that their families are safe and well-supported. This means providing their children the opportunity to thrive academically, socially and emotionally, regardless of duty station, deployments or transition status. Our failure to meet this expectation could negatively impact the strength and the quality of our Army, and ultimately the security and well-being of our country. "After all, the children of our Military Service members should have access to the best education we have to offer. They deserve nothing less." GEN Ray Odierno, 2012.

Kids matter! Our Force is predominately married, with children. The 2013 DoD Demographics reported over 500,000 school-aged, Army-connected youth in grades K-12. This translates to more than 369,000 children (ages 5-18) with Active Duty Service Member parents; 108,000 children from Army National Guard families and 107,000 are children with parents serving in the Army Reserves. Well over 80% of these children attend US public schools, in communities such as this as well as in classrooms where they may be the only military-connected student.

Military parents know how much they ask of their own children: frequent moves and separations, parental deployments, inequities between academic standards from state to state, reestablished routines and challenges to meet graduation requirements in multiple states. Army children move and change schools about three times more frequently than their civilian classmates and they are very likely to spend time in multiple public schools.

Starting over isn't easy and comes at a different price for each child. Predictable support for at home, in school, in the community and through the Army's systems make a difference. When resourced support is inconsistent or missing, our students may struggle to reach their full potential, and for some, this may mean overcoming barriers to graduate on time and then progress to their post-secondary schooling.

When there is intentional and focused support, however, and when leaders, professionals and influencers take the time to ensure that policies, programs and processes are in place and well implemented, children will not only survive but thrive despite the challenges.

Regardless of what force structure mix across the Army components this Commission recommends, the Army will still be required to recruit and retain Soldiers in order to fulfill its mission requirements. It is our experience that civilians considering enlistment, and Soldiers



contemplating extended Army service, will consider among other factors how well their families will be taken care of by the Army and in particular, will my children's opportunities for successful college, career and life readiness be impacted as a result of my service. There are important future implications because of the high percentage of those who join the military come from a family with a legacy of wearing the mantel of Service to our nation. Kids matter—both in the decisions Soldiers make now and in the potential consideration of service options by their children.

Force restructuring requirements will most assuredly increase the turbulence for children with resulting consequences for school continuity. From the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century study, conducted for the CSA by the MCEC (2012), as well as our work with Princeton on the Future of Children (2013)—underscore that frequent school moves are unsettling to the student's confidence as well as contribute to a range of experiences and perceptions regarding students' ability to be successful academically when they enter a receiving school's classroom from prior settings. The reality is that schools are governed at the state and local levels and DoDEA as well. Curricula differs from school to school with differences in scope and sequence. The result is that children can move and miss critical skills in K-12 that are could have cumulative gaps, for example in math, after high school.

I submit with my testimony, the Executive Summary of the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century: Current Dimensions of the Educational Experiences for Army Children. The United States Army Installation Management Command, G-9, Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation asked the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to conduct a study to develop recommendations for both Military leaders and educators on the impacts of school policies, priorities, processes, programs and systems on Military-connected children's education. The results of the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century Study (EMC-21) are set forth in this report.

The Military Child Education Coalition urges this Commission to consider and include in its final report those supporting capabilities that must be resourced and made available in order for the recommended future force to be successful.

One of these resources is Family Programs and those services supporting the Army child. The Army's leadership and these Program Offices in each component, at every echelon, must have the requisite knowledge and capacity to support every Army-connected child to realize their fullest potential for college, career, and life readiness.



This includes the Army's continued strident advocacy for full implementation and compliance of the Military Interstate Children's Compact. All 50 states have adopted the Compact. Member states are forming their state councils and informing school districts of the terms of the Compact. The Compact is meant to ensure that "military children transferring between school districts and states" benefit from uniform treatment.

The Military Child Education Coalition also calls on Army leadership to lead the DoD effort in pressing for legislation at the federal, state, and local levels to implement a Military Student Data Identifier. Today, there is no reliable information about the education of the military child. The 2015 the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission recognized this shortcoming and made a recommendation to implement a Military Student Identifier.

We measure things that we care about to see how we are doing, and how we might be able to improve. Shockingly, there is no public school-based information about military children; nor is there any state or national information. Absent this information, leaders—and more importantly parents are guessing. This means that important decisions about our children are being made in the dark.

The Military Child Education Coalition is calling on Army and DoD leaders to press legislators at every level to enact legislation that establishes reliable, consistent, and sustainable data systems in states for all military students in prekindergarten through grade 12, so we have the information needed to see how our children, whose parents serve are nation, fare in our public schools.

Specific data gaps include information on school transitions, academic performance, special program participation, attendance and other high school graduation and postsecondary transitions. Without a unique identification of the military student within the existing school data systems, knowledge and decisions about these students will continue to be based in soft supposition. The most basic way to support our Soldiers is to improve accuracy so we can ensure effective and informed care of their kids.



Implementation of a national level military student data identifier will yield the following benefits:

- Military parents and students will be able to track and respond to identified needs or opportunities in a timely way in their educational progress from prekindergarten through high school graduation;
- Transition supports for military students (primarily from Active Duty families) who have frequent inter- and intra- state school moves. This system will increase the likelihood that moves from school to school and state-to-state will have fewer process barriers and greater transfer ease, while decreasing the confusion that can result in delays in services, lack of credit, or missed opportunities;
- Military commanders to be provided with useful academic and other school indicators about the children that they are responsible for, as well as information about their communities, the efficacy of school-military partnerships, and data to inform decisions in support of military families both on and off the installations;

As you can see by the accompanying letters from the Vice Chief of the Army and the Chief of the National Guard, this is important to our Army leadership. Military leaders want to be provided with useful academic and other indicators about the children for which they are responsible.

Accompanying my written testimony is our newest publication developed this year, *A Military and Community Leader's Guide on College, Career and Life Readiness for Military and Veteran Connected Children* that stresses the importance of partnerships between informed and engaged leaders from Army Installations, their community peers, and the local education agency.

Mr. Chairman, the Military Child Education Coalition is grateful for this opportunity to spotlight the children of our Army. We are hopeful the Commission will take into consideration our observations and favorably consider them for inclusion in its final report. Ultimately, your recommendations, accepted by the Army, will be another indicator that the Army is indeed serious about fully supporting its families.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and the entire MCEC community, we thank the Commission for your leadership, your essential work for helping to define the future Army force structure, for your dedication to the Soldiers who will fill its ranks, and most important, to their families and children who also serve alongside them.



...for the sake of the child

909 Mountain Lion Circle, Harker Heights, TX 76548 • (254) 953-1923 • (254) 953-1925 fax • www.MilitaryChild.org • CFC #10261

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Ballantyne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John L. Ballantyne

Colonel, US Army (Retired)

Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

Military Child Education Coalition



...for the sake of the child

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About the Military Child Education Coalition® (MCEC)®

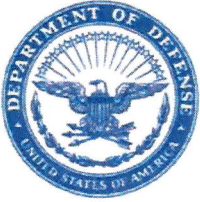
The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is a 501(c)(3) global, nonprofit organization focused exclusively on the well-being and needs of America's four million military and veteran-connected children, specifically in the areas of academic opportunity and excellence, school transition support, and developmental needs. Our goal is to ensure that every child grows and thrives through good and challenging times in order to be college, workplace, and ultimately, life-ready.

Since its inception in 1998, MCEC has spearheaded numerous initiatives addressing the educational and emotional needs of military and veteran-connected youth with an emphasis on the challenges of frequent school moves and separations from a parent. Our highly regarded expertise and experience in professional development, student programs, research, publications, and our long-standing relationships with military, education, and policy leaders along with key partners uniquely positions MCEC to be able to address the needs of the military and veteran-connected students.

While remaining steadfastly focused "for the sake of the child," the MCEC continues to successfully deliver programs, services and practical tools. We hold ourselves to high standards. In addition to our professional accreditations and periodic external reviews, we have ongoing, dynamic and robust systems measuring the efficacy and impact of our initiatives. Because we are in local schools and communities and partnering with world-class colleagues, we have capacity to identify and respond to what's working and what areas might have potential gaps. The Military Child Education Coalition has an excellent track record of moving quickly and decisively to respond to need. We apply rigorous standards to our outreach, and create high quality publications focused on advocating for and serving military and veteran-connected youth and their parents.

We conduct and sponsor research on effective student transitions, conduct training for professionals who work with military-connected children, organize and train student leaders to assist their peers in smooth school transitions, train the parents of military-connected children to support their efforts to ensure that their children have excellent school experiences and advocate for research-based practices that promote personal and academic growth for military-connected children.

The results: the MCEC annually impacts approximately 1,000,000 children and their families through programs, professional development, training, resources and direct support. Another measure of our success is reflected in our audits which demonstrate between 86 and 91 cents of every dollar goes directly to our initiatives that serve the children of those who serve us all.



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHIEF OF STAFF
201 ARMY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20310-0201

December 18, 2014

Mary M. Keller, Ed.D. President and CEO
Military Child Education Coalition
909 Mountain Lion Circle
Harker Heights, TX 76549

Dear Dr. Keller,

Thank you for taking the time to come brief us on your efforts with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). As the parents of two children raised in the Army, Debbie and I share your concern about the lack of a reliable and sustainable database that tracks information regarding our military youth. Knowing how regular dislocation and parents' repeated deployments affect the long-term performance of military children is critical to shaping their path towards success. Furthermore, your work should enable us to truly understand what programs are effective so we can benefit society at large by applying the lessons learned to all groups of highly-mobile youth. We must continue this analytic effort on military-connected children to determine where opportunities to provide aid exist, especially during these times of constrained resources and the Army's drawdown. I fully support your mission.

I appreciate your personal effort leading this campaign and all that MCEC has accomplished on behalf of military-connected youth. I also want to assure you that we are looking forward to participating in the MCEC Annual Training Seminar in July 2015. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at (703) 695-4371 or daniel.b.allyn.mil@mail.mil. MCEC's continued contributions benefit Soldiers, the Army Family, the All-Volunteer Force, and the Nation. Army Strong!

Sincerely,

*Thanks for your passion
for our children... our future!*

Daniel B. Allyn
Daniel B. Allyn
General, U.S. Army



VICE CHIEF OF STAFF
UNITED STATES ARMY
WASHINGTON DC 20310-0201

December 3, 2013

Mary M. Keller, Ed.D. President and CEO
Military Child Education Coalition
909 Mountain Lion Circle
Harker Heights, Texas 76549

Dear ^{Mary}Dr. Keller,

Thank you for taking the time to come brief us and for your efforts with the Military Child Education Coalition. We appreciate you sharing your concerns about the data systems which collect information on the children of our service members. Knowing how regular dislocation and parents' repeated deployments affect the long-term performance of military children is critical to shaping their path towards success, your work could enable us to truly understand what programs are effective so we can benefit society at large by applying the lessons learned to all groups of highly-mobile youth. We must continue to analyze data on military-connected children to see where areas of concern and opportunities to provide aid exist, especially during these times of constrained resources.

I appreciate your effort in leading this campaign and all that you have accomplished on behalf of military-connected youth. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at (703) 695-4371 or john.f.campbell.mil@mail.mil. Your contribution benefits Soldiers, the Army Family, the All-Volunteer Force, and the nation.

Army Strong!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "John F. Campbell".

John F. Campbell
General, U.S. Army



NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU

1636 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON DC 20301-1636

FEB 05 2013

Mary M. Keller, Ed.D
Military Child Education Coalition
909 Mountain Lion Road
Harker Heights, TX 76548-5709

Dear Dr. Keller:

The continuing demands of war and the long-term impacts associated with it are certain to present significant challenges to our National Guard families. Of particular concern is the effect on our Service member's children. Knowing how repeated parental deployments and family separations impact our children in school is vital in our ability to provide the programs and services needed to support them.

The National Guard Bureau, and specifically our Family Programs Division, is aggressively seeking ways to address this issue and has validated the need for a mechanism to identify, collect, and analyze information about National Guard children. Specifically, a reliable, consistent, and sustainable data system that collects information pertaining to graduation rates, adequacy of college preparation, and readiness to enter the workplace would be invaluable in targeting our limited resources for the maximum benefit to our children.

We appreciate your efforts on behalf of military children and are eager to work with you in identifying solutions and opportunities to positively impact our National Guard families and children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Frank J. Grass", is positioned above the typed name.

Frank J. Grass
General, U.S. Army
Chief, National Guard Bureau